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The Committee on Government Reform

Dan Burton (R ~ IN), Chairman

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Opening Statement Chairman Dan Burton Committee on Government Reform “Conflict with Iraq - An Israeli Perspective” September 12, 2002

One year ago, America suffered the horrible events of September 11.

Yesterday, we paused to remember.
We remembered those who died at the Pentagon.
We remembered those who perished in New York.
We remembered those who died in that field in Pennsylvania.

There were moving ceremonies all over the country.

That morning, I stood in the basement of the Capitol Building. I was at a breakfast with colleagues and constituents. If it hadn't been for the heroism of the people on Flight 93, our names might have been added to the long list of victims. So I want to pay special tribute to those brave Americans.

Yesterday was a day to remember.
Today is a day to go back to work.

We've accomplished a great deal in the last year.
We've driven the Taliban from Afghanistan.
We've disrupted terrorist networks.
We've rebuilt the Pentagon.

But we have much more to do.

One of the unfinished pieces of business we have is Iraq. In my opinion, this is a problem we can't continue to ignore. Saddam Hussein is a menace. He has chemical weapons. He has biological weapons. He's working hard to acquire nuclear weapons.

He's used chemical weapons in the past. We should have no doubt that he'll use them again. And if he succeeds in developing nuclear weapons, we could have a catastrophe on our hands.

This morning the President made a strong case for taking action. Now we need to see how the world responds. I hope that our friends and allies around the world will join us. I hope that we can assemble a strong coalition that will stand up to this dangerous regime. However, if we can't, my view is that we have to do what's in our own best interest. If we determine that Saddam Hussein is a serious national security threat, then we have to act - alone if necessary. I hope it won't come to that, but I think the threat is very serious, and we have to treat it seriously.

There's been a lot of second guessing after September 11. Our intelligence agencies have been accused of being asleep at the switch. Many people have said that if we had responded to the evidence we had, we could have prevented September 11. I don't know if we could have prevented that tragedy or not, but I think we find ourselves in a similar situation today.

We know that Saddam Hussein has weapons of mass destruction.
We know he's used them before.
We know he's trying to get more.
We know he's unstable.

If we don't act to eliminate this threat, one way or another, there will be terrible consequences somewhere down the road. Saddam Hussein is developing those weapons for a reason, and I don't think it's to promote world peace. If we don't respond to that threat now, somewhere down the road, I think the second-guessing is going to be about us.

Today, we're very fortunate. For the second time in less than a year, we have with us a very distinguished statesman - Former Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.. Last year, Mr. Netanyahu appeared before us one week after September 11 to talk about terrorism. It was the only time in my twenty years in Congress that I've seen a witness get a sustained round of applause from the entire committee. Mr. Netanyahu, welcome back.

Mr. Netanyahu is going to speak to us today about Iraq. He's going to talk about the Israeli perspective on the threat posed by Saddam Hussein. The Israelis have some experience in this area. During the Persian Gulf War, Iraq fired more than 40 Scud missiles at Israeli cities. So Mr. Netanyahu can speak from experience.

Mr. Prime Minister, thank you for being here today. We're honored. You have a long and distinguished record in fighting terrorism. We look forward to hearing what you have to say.

That concludes my opening statement. I now yield to Mr. Waxman for his statement.